Dear Friend,

Paramahansa Yogananda once wrote of the “great value in visiting places where saints have lived”: 

“Assisi, the abode of St. Francis; Bodh Gaya, where Buddha attained enlightenment; Jerusalem, where Jesus preached — such places are forever permeated with the vibrations left there by the divine souls who walked those grounds. Their vibrations will remain until this earth is dissolved. Where souls have communed with God, there you will find greater communion and response from God. Often such pilgrimages completely change one’s life for the better.”

All of us who find inspiration in the life and teachings of Paramahansaji are fortunate that we can visit the places where he communed with the Divine. The beautiful Windmill Chapel at the Self-Realization Fellowship Lake Shrine is one of them, and it has been a place where thousands of devotees of this blessed path first were introduced to meditation.

The passing of the years and exposure to the elements, however, have taken their toll on this sanctuary. It is in need of major repairs (something we had first reported in the Spring 2011 Voluntary League Appeal); and after completing a thorough engineering survey, we are ready to proceed with a comprehensive renovation.

You will learn about our plans for the Windmill Chapel in the enclosed newsletter, along with our efforts to safeguard other treasures connected with the life of our Guru.

Your prayers, friendship, and monetary support help us to be faithful stewards of the Windmill Chapel and the other sanctuaries associated with the life of Paramahansa Yogananda. They also help us spread his soul-liberating Kriya Yoga teachings and serve his worldwide spiritual family of God-devoted souls. We cherish your gifts, for we know they are motivated by your love for God and Guru.

We are always so inspired by the letters of appreciation that accompany the kind support that we receive from so many of you, and we delight in sharing excerpts such as the following:

“With the dawn of Thy light, the darkness vanishes as though it had never been.”
This was my thought several months into the SRF path. Day after day, minute after minute, the blessings of this path were confirmed to me in a way that made [Paramahansaji’s] words shine with undeniable truth.

We once again thank you for the manifold ways you support this divine mission, and look forward to sharing with you news of how it continues to unfold.

In divine friendship,

SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP
Mother Center

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PRESERVING A BEACON OF PEACE: THE WINDMILL CHAPEL AT SRF LAKE SHRINE

“You will see, later on this will be a pilgrimage place. People will come from all over the world.” Paramahansa Yogananda spoke these prescient words after he acquired the Lake Shrine property in 1949.

The picturesque Windmill Chapel, blessed by Paramahansaji’s presence during several events between 1950 and 1952, remains one of the most charming landmarks at the Self-Realization Fellowship Lake Shrine. Here also Paramahansaji spent time during his last hours on earth, in communion with God in the company of disciples. (See photo below)

Yet the Windmill Chapel is in need of major repairs and renovations to ensure that it endures for future generations.

Much of the necessary work consists of repairing rot and decay caused by age and exposure to the elements. In addition to humidity from the lake itself, the Lake Shrine is less than half a mile from the ocean, with its corrosive salt air and moisture. All of the roofs and window casings, the skylight, the windmill sails, and many other parts of the building must be restored or replaced. (See photos below) The entire tower also needs to be re-waterproofed, and existing water damage needs to be repaired. Termite damage in the cupola and possibly other parts of the building must be addressed.

A detailed structural assessment of the building, made possible by your past generosity in response to our Spring 2011 issue of the Voluntary League Appeal, revealed the ways in which it must be strengthened to withstand an earthquake (ever a threat in seismically active southern California). Engineers have suggested a number of improvements: adding plywood sheathing hidden inside the tower walls, reinforcing the structural...
connection points between the floors, anchoring the ceiling, adding structural steel where necessary, and more.

This repair work also gives us an ideal opportunity to upgrade various aspects crucial to the safety and functionality of the Windmill Chapel, including the furnace, gas lines, electrical and security systems, the fire alarms, and the audio system. It will also allow us to make the necessary improvements for easy accessibility for disabled persons.

SRF monks who are expert carpenters and craftsmen will perform some of the detailed restoration work. Professional engineers and contractors must be hired to complete the majority of the work.

We estimate that it will cost $760,000 to complete the project, and we have already raised $141,000. With your support, we hope to start construction immediately after the 2012 Convocation.

Thank you for helping to preserve this unique and beloved site where our Guru communed with God, and where thousands each year come to be uplifted.

“The Shrine of My Heart”
How My Guru Called Me

[Last year an SRF devotee shared with us the following sacred experience at the Lake Shrine:]

“The first time I came to America, I wanted to visit the Lake Shrine, which I only knew about because I had read that it was one of the favorite places of Elvis Presley!

“To find the way there was very difficult for me, because I didn’t speak English at the time. I arrived after a long bus ride, and a volunteer offered to give me a tour. It was August 20, 1997.

As I looked at the lake lying in front of me—embedded in and surrounded by lovely flowers, bushes and trees—I remember thinking: ‘How much calmness! How much beauty!’ The World Peace Memorial of Mahatma Gandhi and the tumbling waterfall with the statue of Lord Krishna playing the flute impressed me very much.

“Then we came to the Houseboat, where Paramahansa Yogananda had stayed sometimes when he was first establishing the Lake Shrine. I closed my eyes and felt wonderfully safe. When the guide asked me what I felt, I said spontaneously, ‘Love, nothing but love!’

“Then I entered the Windmill Chapel, and again I was filled with love. Sitting at the window I felt a marvelous peace, which I hadn’t felt for a very long time, and it enveloped me.

“We then climbed the stairs up to the temple. We entered, and the guide left me alone in the sanctuary. I looked at the altar and at the large picture of Paramahansa Yogananda on the left side of the dais. (At that time I didn’t know that the day this photo was taken was also August 20th—in 1950 at the dedication of the Lake Shrine.) As I walked down the aisle, and came closer to this picture, something peculiar happened. I felt as if warm waves of vibrating peace and joy, love and assurance, were streaming through my body. This feeling grew stronger the closer I came. And then I stood in front of him—not of his photo! This man in the armchair lived; oh, he lived! His skin, his eyes, shone; and I had the feeling that the next moment he would embrace me. I sank down on a chair in front of him, and a deep inner joy and silence grew within me. I don’t know when I got up—I could barely walk normally!—and how I came into the vestibule, where the guide was waiting patiently.

“I wanted never to lose what I had just experienced there. I filled out the application form for SRF membership that very day—August 20, 1997!

“The Lake Shrine has become the shrine of my heart, because here I met my ever-living Guru.”

—R.K., Germany
Preserving a Sacred Legacy: Artifacts From Our Guru’s Life

The places where Paramahansaji lived are revered by thousands from all over the world as holy places of pilgrimage. Their furnishings and the many personal items used by him are part of the very special atmosphere there, so their care and preservation is of great importance to us.

One example is the armchair Paramahansaji frequently used when meeting with guests in the third-floor reception room at the Mother Center. (See photo left) After our Guru’s mahasamadhi, this chair, so intimately connected with his life and work, was placed at the front of the Main Chapel where the Guru used to conduct meditations and services, and protected with a custom-made Plexiglas cover.

Because of a generous donation from a devotee, we recently were able to hire a team of textile conservators to perform needed cleaning, repairs, and restoration work, while leaving unchanged the signs of use by our beloved Guru. We also had a new Plexiglas cover made to replace the old one.

Previously, thanks in part to support from members like you, this same team of textile conservators assisted us in preserving and protecting the furnishings in Paramahansaji’s sitting room at the Mother Center. (See photo right) We also added a specially designed Plexiglas cover to protect the side of the divan at the entrance to the sitting room.

Preservation of other items in this shrine is also in progress.

Your continued support of the Voluntary League Appeal helps us to protect and preserve the artifacts of Paramahansa Yogananda’s life. Thank you for giving the gift that will help generations of visitors to deepen their connection with the ever-living presence of our divine Guru.

Above: Paramahansa Yogananda with His Excellency Binay R. Sen, Ambassador of India, at the Mother Center, three days before the great Guru’s mahasamadhi. Right top: Professional conservators recently cleaned and restored the chair Paramahansaji used on this and many similar occasions over the years. Right middle: The chair has been returned to its home in the Main Chapel at the Mother Center. Right below: Member support also funded restoration work of this chair and sofa in Paramahansaji’s sitting room at the Mother Center.

Progress Reports: Updates on initiatives mentioned in previous issues, made possible through your generous support

New Translations: We recently published three new editions of Autobiography of a Yogi: a new translation in French and first-time translations in Norwegian and Croatian. Thank you for helping us to reach out ever-increasingly to our world family to share the liberating teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda.

Upgrade of Food Storage Facility: In our Summer 2011 Voluntary League Appeal, we requested your assistance to repair and upgrade the central food storage facility that services our retreats and ashrams in southern California.

We are pleased to report that this project was completed in June this
The roof and ceiling repairs have been finished. The new storage racks are in place, allowing our purchasing staff to work more efficiently. The worn-out large freezer was replaced and a new walk-in refrigerator has been added.

Thanks to your help, we will realize substantial savings annually by being able to buy more of our food in bulk at economical prices.

--- Current Need ---

An important related need is replacing the refrigerated truck that delivers food and other supplies to the Mt. Washington, Lake Shrine, Encinitas and Hidden Valley ashrams and retreats.

After more than eighteen years and 300,000 miles of service, the truck and its refrigeration components are nearing the end of their useful life. New regulations on emissions in California that will go into effect in early 2015 also necessitate replacement of the truck.

We estimate it will cost $80,000 to purchase a new truck of comparable size and fit it with the needed features. We would greatly appreciate your help in making this purchase, so vital to providing our ashrams and retreats with food and other supplies while keeping costs to a minimum.

The Guru’s Ever-Living Presence

The SRF/YSS president and sanghamata, Sri Mrinalini Mata, once described our Guru’s work in this way: “The real ideal of Master’s mission was to awaken in each receptive heart a deep love and longing for God, so that God would become the Primary Reality in the life of each one....And I see, even today, how that transformation takes place in the lives of every seeker who truly follows his teachings and thereby comes within the aura of his ever-living presence and consciousness.”

Inspiring evidence of this comes to us almost daily in the form of messages such as the following one we recently received: “The teachings and practices have led me to know my true nature...I find the peace I get in meditation is unmatchable and the inner silent guidance has proved very beneficial in all platforms. God is ever in us; I do feel His presence, and I love the loving and caring God, who is all around in every particle. I wish everyone would get the experience of contacting God.”

Today, the Guru’s ever-living presence is guiding and blessing those who follow his teachings just as surely as when he graced the world in physical form. All of you who have contributed to his ongoing mission have played a part in transforming the thousands of lives that have been blessed by his guidance and help. Please receive our abiding gratitude and divine friendship.

Each year Self-Realization Fellowship monastics travel to countries in North and South America, Europe, and Asia to conduct classes, Kriya Yoga initiation ceremonies, and public lectures on the teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda. Above: A recent class held in Weiden, Germany